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8 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Vietnam Committee Matters

1. At this moment, the most important element of the Vietnam situation is the fast burgeoning rivalry between Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu, both of whom seem determined to run for president. We (VAS) have reviewed the bidding on this in considerable detail with Messrs. Colby and Blaufarb. Outlined below is our joint intelligence assessment and recommended course of action.

2. Intelligence Assessment: The Thieu-Ky rivalry is already beginning to split the military establishment and has begun to create friction between major non-Communist civilian groups who should be cooperating instead of competing. The rivalry has gone further and its divisive effects are already more serious than the Embassy seems to appreciate, though Bunker's latest weekly (Saigon 27781) indicates that he is coming around to our view. If this rivalry is not shortstopped in the very near future, much that has been politically achieved within South Vietnam will be jeopardized and prospects for continued progress will be bleak.

3. Recommended Course of Action: The US Government does not want to be put in the public position of backing any given Vietnamese political figure or of intervening directly in internal Vietnamese political affairs. Our investment in Vietnam, however, is of such a magnitude that we cannot let it be jeopardized by personal rivalry among Vietnamese with political ambitions. We believe the following course of action will help to foreclose the Thieu-Ky political struggle without involving the US too heavily in the fortunes of any single individual:

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a) Ambassador Bunker should see both Thieu and Ky -- separately -- as soon as possible and deliver the following pitch to each: The US Government feels that Thieu and Ky cannot both seek the office of president without doing irreparable harm to the essential unity of the South Vietnamese military establishment and nationalist, non-Communist elements in civilian political life. We thus feel it imperative that these two patriots agree between themselves that only one should campaign for the office of president while the other should remain within the military establishment to hold it together and insure its continued effectiveness in the national interest. We would not presume to suggest which of the two should play which role, for that is a Vietnamese matter that only the Vietnamese parties involved can decide. We do feel, however, that this basic decision has to be taken immediately (i. e., within 72 hours) in order to prevent irreparable divisions among anti-Communist nationalists, both civilian and military. We would appreciate being privately informed of the decision reached and are confident that the patriotism and integrity of both principals will lead them to the choice that is most in the Vietnamese national interest.

(1) If the pitch is put this way and bought, Thieu would probably want to run the military (a position he would not want Ky to have) and Ky will probably be the candidate for president. If he is the only military candidate, he will almost certainly win and will not need to rig the vote. All factors considered, this would be the optimum solution in terms of US interest. If, however, Thieu should emerge as the military candidate with Ky remaining in the armed forces, it would be better to have Thieu as president and the military establishment united than to have Ky persist in running at the risk of military unity.

b) If Ky and Thieu have not sorted themselves out within 72 hours after Ambassador Bunker has delivered the above demarche to both men, the Ambassador should see them both

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again, reiterate his pitch in even stronger terms, and say that if the two principals cannot decide between themselves within 24 hours, the US will have no option but to approach the members of the Armed Forces Congress through their appropriate US military counterparts with a request that the Congress of the Armed Forces convene forthwith to select a single military candidate for the office of president.

4. If (b) does not work, Ambassador Bunker should be prepared to tell both Thieu and Ky, and their colleagues in the army, that since the military establishment cannot agree on a single candidate, the US believes it necessary for both military candidates to withdraw and allow the election to go to a civilian. Whether this third threat should be raised at the time of the second demarche or later is a tactical decision that would have to be made in light of the atmospherics prevailing in Saigon at the time and should not be decided in advance in Washington.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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8 June 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: U.S. Interests and the Vietnamese Elections

SUMMARY

This memorandum addresses itself to three questions which have been posed regarding the forthcoming national elections in Vietnam: (1) Will Ky win the election? (2) Is it in the U.S. interest for him to win? (3) Should we do anything to help him?

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1. Will Ky Win the Election? Ky will almost certainly win if Thieu withdraws from the contest. Ky's chances of winning will be slightly better than even if Thieu resigns from the Army and runs as a civilian candidate, thereby minimizing the prospects for an open split of the 'establishment.' If Thieu remains in the Army and runs as an alternate government candidate, however, Ky's chances of victory would be less than even, since Ky and Thieu would be competing not only for the military vote but also for the support of essentially the same pre-Government, nationalist groups. Under these circumstances, Ky's entourage (e.g., Loan) might be able to salvage victory through blatant manipulation and fraud, but such a victory would be Pyrrhic in character, would open serious wounds within the military, would sow seeds of instability and popular revulsion, and would negate the progress made thus far in the political development process.

2. Do We Want Ky to Win? Among all the potential contenders, Ky offers the most net attractions. He has demonstrated political skill and increasing maturity; he has grown steadily into his responsibilities. We know

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we can work with him and that he can produce results as an executive. His ideals are basically sound and have potential political appeal. His policies and aims are generally consistent with ours. His victory would offer optimum prospects for continuity and momentum in our jointly developed programs, for cooperation between military and civilian elements, for development of a genuinely broad political organization, and for effective communication between the urban and rural masses, on the one hand, and the governmental and national political leadership on the other.

3. A victory by Thieu would be less compatible with U.S. interests. Thieu probably would not have the full support and cooperation (even after winning) of the critically important Young Turk military element, and he would not attract as wide a political base as Ky among civilian groups. A government headed by Thieu would most likely be less flexible, dynamic and progressive in its approach to solutions of Vietnam's problems and more inclined to be Mandarin, rigid and paternalistic in the Diem pattern. Thieu's principal support stems from the older political generation, which is steeped in traditional (and ineffectual) Vietnamese political forms and practices and which has little appeal to the youth.

4. A victory by Tran Van Huong would be potentially disruptive, particularly if it were achieved at the expense of the Thieu-Ky rivalry. Although much of Huong's appeal derives from his integrity and southern origin, his victory would be dependent on strong support from extremist, anti-establishment elements -- Gaullist-oriented southern separatists and militant Buddhists -- whose views he would be unable to ignore. While he had indicated he might be able to work with Ky after the election, his compulsion to do so would diminish if the military establishment were split during the campaign, and his ability to do so effectively would be limited by virtue of the character and prejudices of his political base. The factors which contributed to the instability of his brief tenure as Prime Minister in late 1964 -- the fundamental clash between the military and the Buddhist extremists -- would militate against the prospects for success another time around.

5. A victory by Phan Khac Suu -- which is most unlikely in any event -- would not offer hopeful prospects either for stability or for effective government. Suu himself has never demonstrated political astuteness or effective leadership ability, and it is unlikely that the more dynamic and progressive Dr. Dan -- his prospective running mate -- could effectively counter Suu's unfortunate weaknesses.

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6. On balance, U. S. interests would best be served if Ky were to win in a reasonably clean contest, and if he were to broaden the base of his post-election government by honoring his reported commitment to incorporate Huong as Prime Minister. Such a government would offer optimum prospects for stability, continuity, and development of a mass, popular base. Moreover, it would represent the optimum political challenge to the Communists, since any other result would offer prospects for instability which the Communists could nurture to their ultimate advantage. 25X1

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8 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on 2 June Bundy Package

1. William Bundy's 30 May paper is essentially an attack on the 19 May DOD (McNaughton) analysis which we discussed at lunch on 25 May. I share Bill's dim view of the DOD paper and generally agree with his rebuttal.

2. I support Bundy's discussion on the role of the South Vietnamese with one addition and one caveat:

a. There is an obvious South Vietnamese tendency to let us do it. There is also an equally dangerous but slightly different penchant in the South Vietnamese military establishment for seeking gimmick solutions (e.g., the "fancy fence" to stop infiltration) which could obviate the grubby task of addressing the problem of local security. We must focus the Viets on the tasks and steer them away from chasing gimmicks.

b. I do not agree with Bundy, or Komer, on force levels. We (VAS) still think there is a critical need for nine more Free World maneuver battalions in I Corps, six more in II Corps, and three more in III Corps.

3. Bundy's discussion of US objectives and the stakes in Asia is right on target.

4. Komer's essential analysis is sound, though his recommendations are more hortatory and shotgun than usefully concrete. The key ingredients

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to improved ARVN local security performance are:

- a. A clearer sense of mission (i. e. , aggressive harassment of VC local forces rather than any attempt to provide a "screen").
- b. Better armament (e. g. , M-16s in lieu of M-1s) which will permit ARVN units to cope with equivalent Communist units. (At present ARVN platoons, companies and battalions are outgunned by their Communist counterparts.)

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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8 June 1967

The Director

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Attached for your information and use
are the following documents:

(1) The commentary you asked for on
Bundy's 2 June package.

(2) A political action assessment and
recommendation developed in concert
with Colby and Blaufarb.

(3) ~~XXX~~ A cut at the paper you asked
for last week on the elections and the
US posture, coordinated with FE. (This
needs more polishing but is given to you
today in case you want it this afternoon).

I make this suggestion with great diffidence,
but if you find yourself impossibly pressed for
time I would, of course, be happy to represent
you at the Vietnam sessions until the Middle
East crisis passes.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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8 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Bunker's 7 June Weekly (Saigon 27781, NODIS)

1. You should read Bunker's over-view (paras 1-5).
2. You should also read his summary of the Thieu-Ky rivalry (paras 6-7).
3. If you want a quick recap of the gory details of (2), they are well set forth in paras 8-21.
4. You can skip the remainder of the cable.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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